

The Effectiveness of Group Guidance with ‘Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed’ Technique on Students’ Assertiveness: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling utilizing the “Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed” technique in improving student engagement at SMP Muhammadiyah 57 Medan. Employing an experimental pretest-posttest control group design, the research divided subjects into an experimental group receiving the counseling intervention and a control group that did not. Data were collected using a validated and reliable student engagement questionnaire and analyzed statistically. The results demonstrated a significant increase in engagement within the experimental group, with a pretest-posttest significance value of 0.000. Furthermore, a significant difference ($p=0.007$) was found between the experimental and control groups, confirming the intervention’s efficacy. The novelty of this research lies in applying and empirically validating this specific therapeutic technique within a school counseling context to directly target engagement. A key practical implication is that school counselors can adopt this structured group counseling technique as a proven, alternative strategy to actively help students manage overwhelming feelings and thereby foster higher academic participation. This study contributes by providing empirical evidence for a practical counseling method and offering a replicable framework for enhancing student engagement through targeted emotional coping strategies in educational settings.

Keywords: Coping with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed, Group Guidance, Low Engagement

A. Introduction

Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and a learning process that is active, enabling students to develop their potential optimally, including their spiritual strength, self-control, personality, and intelligence (Amira Nur Fajar, Siti Fatimah, 2023). However, high academic demands, whether from the curriculum, teachers, or the environment, often lead to low assertiveness in students, particularly for those who lack skills in self-management and active participation in learning (Ashari & Nasution, 2024). For instance, the 2013 Curriculum increases students’ academic burdens, so first-year students, in particular, often face pressure

to effectively express ideas, thoughts, and opinions to meet academic demands and actively participate in class (Dharmayana., 2020).

Assertiveness is the ability of an individual to express thoughts, feelings, and opinions honestly, firmly, and appropriately without harming or infringing on the rights of others. However, in reality, many students exhibit low assertiveness, such as difficulty in expressing opinions, lacking the courage to refuse harmful invitations, hesitating to ask for help, or being unable to manage peer pressure (Nikolaiev et al, 2023). This low assertiveness can lead to weak self-confidence, the emergence of deviant behavior, and disturbances in social relationships with others. This condition highlights the need for appropriate interventions to help students develop assertive attitudes positively.

The symptoms of low assertiveness in students can manifest in various forms, including difficulty expressing ideas, lack of confidence when speaking, inability to voice opinions, and limited participation in learning activities (Keates, 2022; Mc Cabe, & Timmins, 2003). Academic pressure, excessive assignments, and expectations from parents and teachers often influence students' thinking, self-expression abilities, emotions, and behaviors, and can even hinder their personal development. According to Stoltz in (Juwita, & Usodo, 2020), students' Adversity Quotient is categorized into three groups: quitters (those who give up on challenges), campers (those who remain in their comfort zone), and climbers (those who face and overcome difficulties).

According to a study by Stepney, S. A. (2017); Henry, A., & Thorsen, C. (2020), the low participation of students in counseling activities is often caused by a lack of self-expression skills, which hinders emotional management and reduces motivation to participate actively. Similarly, Ardilles Putri, et al., (2024) found that low assertiveness also affects students' involvement in learning, decreasing its effectiveness. One effective strategy to address low assertiveness is group counseling services using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique. This service helps students manage feelings of overwhelm, improve self-control, and encourage active participation through supportive group dynamics (Dinda Asmidar Tanjung, 2025).

According to (Rochmn et al., 2024), one effective strategy to address low assertiveness is group counseling services using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique. This service helps students manage feelings of overwhelm, enhance self-control, and encourage active participation through supportive group dynamics. This study uses coping theory. How individuals manage stress and feelings of being overwhelmed through specific strategies, which can reduce emotional pressure, improve self-control, and help individuals adapt to challenging situations (Setiawati et al., 2024). In line with the statement by (Tomi Putra, 2025), one of the efforts that can be made is through group counseling services with the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique, an approach that helps students recognize and address feelings of overwhelm, enabling them to become more courageous, confident,

and assertive. Through this service, it is expected that students will improve their assertiveness, supporting their personal, social, and academic development.

Based on initial observations at SMP Muhammadiyah 57 Medan, most students appear to follow lessons in a formal manner, but there are indications of low assertiveness among many students. Students experience difficulty expressing ideas and opinions in class, particularly when asked to answer questions or engage in discussions in front of their peers. This condition causes some students to become passive, preferring to remain silent or rely on their classmates' answers, even though they are academically capable. The low assertiveness becomes an obstacle to the development of creativity and active participation in the learning process. The main issue that arises is the feeling of shame and fear of making mistakes, which prevents students from expressing their ideas. Many students worry that if their answers or opinions are wrong, they will be laughed at or criticized by their peers. This fear causes them to hold back from speaking in front of the class or participating in group discussions. As a result, communication skills and the ability to convey ideas effectively have not developed optimally, and motivation to engage actively in learning decreases.

A clear example of this condition can be seen during group discussions or class presentations. Some students prefer to remain silent or copy their peers' answers because they are afraid of being ridiculed if they make a mistake. Others appear nervous, with shaky voices or lowered heads when asked to respond, making it difficult for them to communicate the information they want to share effectively. To address this issue, group counseling services using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique are needed. This approach aims to help students manage their feelings of embarrassment, improve self-control, and encourage active participation in expressing ideas and opinions, thus enhancing their assertiveness.

The research method used in this study is a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group design (Abraham, Irfan, 2022). This study was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 57 Medan, involving two intact classes, totaling 52 students as the population. One class was assigned as the experimental group, while the other class was designated as the control group through cluster random assignment. The experimental group received group counseling services using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique, while the control group received no special treatment and only participated in the school's routine services. This design was chosen to determine the differences in students' assertiveness levels before and after the intervention, as well as to compare the results between the experimental and control groups.

The independent variable in this study is the group counseling service using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique, which is a form of group counseling intervention aimed at helping students identify and manage feelings of

overwhelm to enable them to behave more assertively. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is student assertiveness, which refers to the ability of students to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions honestly and appropriately without infringing on the rights of others. The instrument used is an assertiveness scale with a four-choice Likert model (Ghozali, 2013), which was developed based on indicators such as the ability to express opinions, refuse politely, ask for help, express disagreement, and manage peer pressure. This instrument was tested for validity and reliability through expert review and a trial test. The validity test was conducted using Pearson's Product Moment correlation between the score of each item and the total score (Ghozali, 2013).

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest results were then analyzed in three stages. First, a descriptive analysis was conducted, which included calculating the mean, standard deviation, and categorizing the students' assertiveness levels. Second, normality and homogeneity tests were performed. Third, to test the effectiveness of the intervention, inferential analysis was conducted using a paired sample t-test to assess the differences before and after the intervention within each group, and an independent sample t-test to compare the posttest results between the experimental and control groups.

B. Methods

A quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group design was used (Rogers, & Revesz, 2019; Robbins et al., 2012). The population was eleventh-grade students from SMAN 3 Malang. A sample of 60 students was selected from two intact classes, which were then randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n=30) or the control group (n=30). All participants and their guardians provided informed consent prior to the study. The experimental group received the intervention "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed". Assertiveness was measured using a validated questionnaire consisting of 20 items across four subscales: Expressing Opinions, Making Requests, Saying No, and Giving Criticism. Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 4 = Always). For the current sample, the instrument demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.982.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed for all scores. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of score distributions, and Levene's test was used to check the assumption of homogeneity of variance. To compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group, paired sample t-tests were used. An independent samples t-test was used to compare post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. A normality test is a test conducted to assess the distribution of data in a dataset or variable, determining whether the data follows a normal distribution or not. Based on the empirical experience of several statistical experts, data with more than 30 values ($n > 30$) can generally be assumed to be normally distributed. This is often referred to as a large sample. However, to ensure certainty about whether the data is normally

distributed or not, a normality test should be used. This is because data with more than 30 values cannot always be guaranteed to be normally distributed, just as data with fewer than 30 values is not necessarily non-normally distributed (Zulkifli et al., 2025). The normality test is commonly used for data measured on ordinal, interval, or ratio scales. If the analysis uses parametric methods, the assumption of normality must be met, meaning the data should come from a normal distribution. If the data is not normally distributed, or if the sample size is small and the data is nominal or ordinal, non-parametric statistical methods should be used. For this normality test, the Shapiro-Wilk test is applied.

C. Results and Discussion

Normality Test

A normality test is a test conducted to assess the distribution of data within a dataset or variable, determining whether the data follows a normal distribution or not. Based on the empirical experience of several statistical experts, data with more than 30 values ($n > 30$) can generally be assumed to be normally distributed, often referred to as a large sample. However, to ensure certainty about whether the data is normally distributed, it is recommended to perform a normality test. This is because data with more than 30 values cannot always be guaranteed to be normally distributed, and conversely, data with fewer than 30 values does not necessarily mean it is not normally distributed (Zulkifli et al., 2025). Normality tests are typically used to measure data on ordinal, interval, or ratio scales. If the analysis uses parametric methods, the assumption of normality must be met, meaning the data should come from a normal distribution. If the data is not normally distributed, or if the sample size is small and the data is nominal or ordinal, then non-parametric statistical methods should be used. For this normality test, the Shapiro-Wilk test is applied. The Shapiro-Wilk test is one of the most commonly used statistical tests for assessing normality, particularly for small to medium sample sizes. This test provides a W statistic and a p-value, which are used to determine whether the data is normally distributed. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, the data is considered to follow a normal distribution (Isnaini et al., 2025). Below is the table of the test results:

Table 1. Normality Test

	Shapiro-Wilk		Sig.
	Statistic	df	
Group guidance services with techniques <i>Cope with the of Being Overwhelmed</i> Control Class	0.722	23	0.200
Group guidance services with techniques <i>Cope with the of Being Overwhelmed</i> Experimental Class	0.960	23	0.456

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
 a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

In Table 1, the results of the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test show that the significance value for the group counseling service with the “Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed” technique in the control group is 0.200, and for the experimental group, it is 0.456. Both values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data for the group counseling service with the “Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed” technique, in both the control and experimental groups, are normally distributed.

Homogeneity Test

The purpose of the homogeneity test is to determine whether multiple groups of research data have the same variance or not. If homogeneity is not met, parametric analysis may need to be replaced with non-parametric methods. The homogeneity test also aims to provide assurance that the data, including manipulated data in a series of analyses, come from populations that do not differ significantly in their variability. Below is the table of the homogeneity test results:

Table 2. Homogeneity Test

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Group guidance services with techniques Cope with the of Being Overwhelmed	Based on Mean	5.956	1	50	0.068
	Based on Median	3.071	1	50	0.086
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3.071	1	24.539	0.092
	Based on trimmed mean	3.698	1	50	0.060

In Table 2, the results of the variance homogeneity test using Levene’s Test show that the significance values for all calculation methods (mean, median, median with adjusted df, and trimmed mean) are greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data have homogeneous variances, thus meeting the assumption of homogeneity.

Descriptive Statistics Test

Descriptive statistics is a branch of statistics that involves data collection, presentation, determining statistical values, and creating diagrams or charts about a particular subject, presenting data in a form that is easier to understand or interpret. The type of statistical technique used to test descriptive hypotheses must correspond to the type of data or variables based on their measurement scale, such as nominal, ordinal, or interval/ratio (Muchon, 2017). Below is the table of the test results:

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Pretest Control	23	54	149	118.17	25.074	628.696
Pretest Experiment	29	97	125	107.07	6.974	48.638
Posttest Control	23	94	154	140.57	13.668	186.802
Posttest Experiment	29	133	149	141.45	4.725	22.328
Valid N (listwise)	23					

Based on Table 3, the results of the descriptive statistics analysis provide the following data overview. In the pretest of the control class (PreKon), which consisted of 23 students, the lowest score was 54 and the highest score was 149, with an average of 118.17. The data spread is quite large, as indicated by the standard deviation of 25.074 and variance of 628.696, suggesting a significant difference in initial abilities within the control class. Meanwhile, in the pretest of the experimental class (PreEks) with 29 students, the minimum score was 97 and the maximum score was 125. The average score was 107.07, with a standard deviation of 6.974 and variance of 48.638. This indicates that the initial abilities of the students in the experimental class were more uniform compared to the control class.

Next, in the posttest of the control class (PostKon), the minimum score was 94 and the maximum score was 154, with an average of 140.57. The standard deviation was 13.668, and the variance was 186.802, indicating an improvement in the group counseling service using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique compared to the pretest, although the distribution of scores still showed considerable variation. In the posttest of the experimental class (PostEks), the lowest score was 133, and the highest was 149, with an average score of 141.45. The standard deviation was relatively small at 4.725, with a variance of 22.328, indicating that the students in the experimental class not only showed improvement but also had more consistent results compared to the control class.

Overall, both the control and experimental classes showed improvement in the group counseling service using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique from pretest to posttest. However, the experimental class demonstrated more consistent results with a higher average and smaller spread of scores, suggesting that the treatment given to the experimental class was more effective in improving the group counseling service using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique.

Paired Sample t-Test

The paired sample t-test is a method used to assess the effectiveness of an intervention, indicated by the difference in means before and after the intervention (Diah Ayu Rahmani, Risnawati, 2025). The paired sample t-test is one of the most commonly used parametric inferential methods for analyzing paired data. This test is designed to compare the means of two measurements taken from the same group or subject at two different points in time. The advantage of this method lies in its ability to control for between-subject variation, as the analysis focuses on the differences within the same individual. Therefore, the paired t-test provides more accurate information in evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention. Below is the table of the test results:

Table 4. Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper		
Pair 1 Pretest Control - Posttest Control	-22.391	17.288	3.605	-29.867	-14.915	-6.211	220.000
Pair 2 Pretest Experiment - Posttest Experiment	-34.379	6.668	1.238	-36.916	-31.843	-27.766	280.000

Based on Table 4, the results of the Paired Samples Test show that in the control group, the mean difference between the pretest and posttest scores is -22.391, with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. This indicates a significant difference between the conditions before and after the intervention, although the improvement observed is not as large as in the experimental group. Meanwhile, in the experimental group, the mean difference is -34.379, with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. This result shows a highly significant improvement after students received group counseling services using the “Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed” technique. Additionally, the mean difference in the experimental group is larger than in the control group, indicating that this service is more effective in helping students manage feelings of overwhelm. Therefore, it can be concluded that group counseling services using the “Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed” technique have a positive and significant impact on improving students’ ability to manage and cope with feelings of overwhelm, and are more effective compared to the services provided to the control group.

Independent Sample t-Test

The independent sample t-test can be used to determine whether there is a significant difference in the means between two independent samples, as the samples are not related or paired. The independent sample t-test is used to compare the means of two independent groups (not related) to test if there is a significant difference between them (Prasetyo & Sabilah, 2024). Below is the table of the results:

Table 5. Independent Samples Test

	t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Group guidance services with techniques Cope with the of Being Overwhelmed	Equal variances assumed	50	0.007	-0.883	2.717	-6.341	4.574
	Equal variances not assumed	26.184	0.009	-0.883	2.982	-7.010	5.244

Based on the results of the Independent Samples Test, the significance values (Sig. 2-tailed) are 0.007 (equal variances assumed) and 0.009 (equal variances not assumed). Both values are less than 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The mean difference is -0.883, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -6.341 to 4.574. This indicates that the group counseling service using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique has a significant impact in helping students address low engagement and is proven to be more effective compared to the control group.

Low assertiveness is characterized by a lack of courage to express opinions, difficulty rejecting peer invitations, fear of making mistakes, and reluctance to speak in public. This condition is commonly observed among the students of SMP Muhammadiyah 57 Medan, who are the subjects of this study. This phenomenon aligns with the view of Ghoraihi et al. (2022), who argue that academic pressure can cause students to lose the confidence to express their ideas, leading them to become silent, passive, and even feel inferior. If left unaddressed, this can have a negative impact on students' personality development, lower self-esteem, and increase the risk of social problems in the future.

To address this issue, group counseling services using the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique were provided as an alternative solution. Based on data analysis, validity and reliability tests show that the research instrument used is highly valid. The instrument's reliability achieved a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.982, which is considered very high, meaning that all items consistently measure the assertiveness variable. The normality and homogeneity tests also met the required conditions, allowing the data to be further analyzed using the t-test.

The results of the Paired Samples Test for the experimental group show a significant difference between the pretest and posttest, with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 (< 0.05). This proves that group counseling services using the coping technique effectively increased students' assertiveness. Students who were previously silent, hesitant, and passive became more open, confident in expressing their opinions, and able to manage anxiety when speaking in front of others after the intervention. Furthermore, the results of the Independent Samples Test, with a significance value (Sig.) of 0.007 (< 0.05), indicate a significant difference between the experimental group, which received the intervention, and the control group, which did not. The experimental group showed a much better improvement in assertiveness compared to the control group. This reinforces the effectiveness of the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique in the context of group counseling services.

The findings of this study support the coping theory by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which asserts that individuals can manage stress and feelings of being overwhelmed through specific strategies, reducing emotional pressure and increasing adaptive capabilities (Fina Khilayatu Zahwa, 2024). In group counseling services, coping

strategies are provided through exercises, discussions, and supportive group dynamics, helping students feel accepted, safe, and confident in expressing their opinions (Dinda Asmidar Tanjung, 2025). The process of group interaction also encourages students to learn from others' experiences, fostering self-confidence and assertiveness.

The results of this study are also in line with the findings of (Rahma et al., 2024), who state that low assertiveness has the potential to hinder students' social development and may lead to deviant behavior. Through group counseling services, students are trained to express their thoughts honestly and assertively, without offending or harming others. This aligns with the value of assertiveness, which emphasizes a balance between respecting oneself and others.

When compared to previous studies, these findings are consistent. Research found that the application of coping techniques was effective in increasing students' courage to actively participate in class and reducing feelings of shame. Similarly, Dini's study (Purwanta, 2022) demonstrated that the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique effectively improved students' ability to manage negative emotions and fostered a positive attitude in social interactions. The consistency of these findings reinforces the idea that group counseling services using coping techniques can be an effective counseling strategy to enhance students' assertiveness at various educational levels.

Group counseling services using coping techniques can be an effective counseling strategy to enhance students' assertiveness at various educational levels. Practically, the results of this study suggest that the program not only supports the development of individual assertiveness but also fosters a sense of togetherness, social support, and collective learning among students. This aligns with (Purwanta, 2022) which shows that group counseling services can significantly improve the assertiveness of junior high school students using sociodrama techniques, with significant differences between the experimental and control groups (Purwanta, 2022). Therefore, this service provides benefits in building self-confidence, and the improvement in assertiveness not only affects students' courage to speak but also contributes to the development of a more mature personality.

D. Conclusions

This study conclusively demonstrates that group counseling employing the "Cope with the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed" technique is a highly effective intervention for significantly improving student engagement at SMP Muhammadiyah 57 Medan, as rigorously confirmed by the statistically significant differences observed both within the experimental group and between the experimental and control groups. The key finding is that this structured technique successfully addresses the core emotional state feeling overwhelmed that undermines academic participation, thereby directly

and positively impacting engagement levels. The primary practical implication is that school counselors should proactively integrate this specific group counseling strategy into their standard service programs as a proven method to help students develop crucial emotional coping skills, build self-confidence, and foster a more supportive peer environment, all of which contribute to more active and sustained learning involvement. For future research, it is recommended to investigate the long-term sustainability of these engagement improvements and to explore which specific student subgroups or demographic factors most influence the technique's effectiveness. Furthermore, studies should replicate this intervention in diverse school settings and cultural contexts to assess its generalizability and adapt the methodology for broader application. Additionally, future research could employ qualitative methods to gain deeper insight into the students' subjective experiences of the counseling process and how precisely the coping mechanisms translate into behavioral change in the classroom, providing a more nuanced understanding of the intervention's impact mechanism.

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